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KALI-WORSHIP

LECTURE DELIVERED BY

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(Sister Nivedita of the Rama Krishna Mission).

AT THE KALI'S TEMPLE AT KALIGHAT

On the 28th May, 1899.



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KALI-WORSHIP.

The following is the substance of a lecture delivered by Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret Noble) of the Rama Krishna Mission, at the Kali's Temple at Kalighat, Calcutta, on Sunday, May 28th, 1899.

The spot where we are met this evening is the most sacred of all the shrines of Kali. For long ages it has been the refuge of pious souls in need, sorrow and thanksgiving, and their last thought in the hour of death, and who shall say to how many of the saints the mother has revealed Herself just here? One she has called child, and another Hero. One has been Her devotee simply, mad with the wine of Her Benediction and Her Beauty, and yet another has felt Her as his innermost self. For as the souls are numberless, so also are their powers, and innumerable are the wants that she can satisfy.

From this place Her voice goes out through the whole world sounding gently at the hour of evening and the time of dawn,—“My children, my children, I even I am your mother!”

The calls of the world may drown that voice in the glare of day light, but with the return of the Hours of Peace, men sit alone with their own hearts, and then no matter how they misinterpret, come the still small tones of that communion,—so small, so distant, that we scarcely hear them, though some day we shall realise that everything in the universe—every experience in life—is but a note in the organ music of the voice of Kali.

The associations of the place are sacred, the time is sacred, this very blood and dust of the shrine are holy. Let us realise that we are gathered here, where so many millions of the dead have come to pray, not to hear a lecture but to worship.

Those of us who feel that the search after God is the be-all and end-all of human life—that the wise man, the man of fullest living, is he who cries out, with his whole soul in the cry, “Like as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God,”—we who believe this will see in national customs, in national history, in ‘national ways of viewing things, only one or other mantle in which to clothe the apprehension of the Divine.

It was so that the Semite dreaming of God in the moment of highest rapture called him “Our Father,” and the European, striving to add the true complement to God as the Child, saw bending over Him that Glorified Maiden, whom he knew as “Our Lady.” But in India the conception of women is simpler, more personal, more complete. For India there is one relationship that makes the home—that makes sanctity—that enters into every fibre of the being; and it is not Fatherhood. What wonder that in India God’s tenderest name is that of Mother?

This idea of the Motherhood of God has about it all that mysterious fascination that clings to the name of India for those who know it as students of history or philosophy.

In the old days, long before the birth of Buddhism, she was the land of treasures to which men must go for precious stones, and sandal-wood and ivory. Then came the time when she meant much to the Western day that was dawning in Greece. The days of Buddhism, when her Gymnosophists taught the Greek philosopher her ancient wisdom, even then, perhaps, ancient. Again came our Middle Ages, when the countries round the Mediterranean had somewhat recovered breath, and when the Crusades began. The Crusades—which were the meeting-ground between East and West—Eastern tendencies and interests streaming towards Baghdad, and thence being thrown on the Syrian deserts by the Saracen.

Here in the Crusades, and afterwards in the Moorish occupation of Spain, and always in the streets and by-ways of those fascinating old ports of Venice and Genoa, must have been born the true mystery of the name of India.

The wonderful tales of travellers and pilgrims, the magnificence of Indian escorts and palaces, the feats of jugglers and the extraordinary powers of endurance shown by Indian ascetics, all these associations are called up by the name of India, for those who have never walked under the palm trees, nor seen the wild peacocks of the Motherland. And those are the associations of mediæval Europe.

Not contemporary with these surely, but belonging to the earlier days of the English occupation, is the glamour round the names of Indian doctrines. Such a delusive sheen tinges the popular reading of the word Mâya, and such a spirit arises when we hear that in India you talk of this—the Motherhood of God.

Not but that this is a conception that must occur in all religions that are to satisfy the soul. The Galilean Teacher did not forget it, when he took a little child, and set him in the midst, and said "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven." St. Paul wrote to his disciples as a mother greatly anguished till Christ be formed in them. Every true and tender word of help and counsel has added to the Semitic idea, "Like as a father pitieith his children," that sweeter notion of the Aryans, "Like as a mother pitieith her children." But in Christianity it has been implied—not overtly expressed, and the curious divergence between Indian and European ideals of women comes in here, further to thwart the birth of the thought of Motherhood in worship.

One of the most beautiful fragments of devotion that have come down to us from our Middle Ages is a little old French manuscript called "Our Lady's Tumler." Here it might be thought, we had lighted on real Motherworship. But this is not so—for the characteristic utterance is "Lady, you are the *mon-joie* (my-joy) that lightens all the world,—i. e., worship is not being offered to a mother, but to a queen. In India, this is never so. Behind palace walls or within her mud hut woman lives much the same simple and beautiful life of the old Aryan villages. Exquisite cleanliness and simplicity, infinite purification, and always the same intimate motherhood.

The notion of the lady is foreign to India, and those who love the country cannot be too thankful that it is so. Not that Indian woman should be deprived of anything that would make life noble and sweet and strong, but that their conception of existence is already more beautiful because more noble than any exotic notion. It must be through the intensifying of the Indian ideal of selflessness and wisdom and social power that Emancipation shall come.

And this absence of luxury and self-indulgence from the ideal conception of Indian womanhood is fitly imaged in this symbol that you make to yourselves of God, the most precious religious symbol in the world, perhaps God the Mother,—not the Queen. And of this symbol, you have made three forms—*Durgā, Jagadharī and Kālī*.

In *Durgā*, we have, indeed, an element of Queenhood, but it is the power of the Queen, not her privilege.

Emerging from amidst the ten points of the compass, one foot on the lion, and one on the *Asura*, striking with the serpent and holding instruments of worship and weapons of destruction, there is, in *Durgā*, a wonderful quality of literary interpretation. She is a wonderful symbol of the Power that manifests itself as Nature—the living energy at the centre of this whirlpool.

Dim overhead is that series of pictures of the Giving of the Gods, that brings home to us the relation of God, of our own soul, to this great Energy.

Below, all movement and turmoil, above, the calm of eternal meditation. The Soul inert, and Nature the great awakener. Behind both That Which manifests as both—*Brahman*.

Look at it how you will, could there be a finer picture than this of the complete duality? But *Durgā* is the Mother of the Universe. The Divine and resistless Energy that kills almost as many as it brings to the birth, that fosters by the terrible process of the destruction of the unfit.

Are God and Nature then at strife

That Nature sends such evil dreams ?

So careful of the type she seems,

So careless of the single life ?

That I, considering everywhere

Her secret meaning in her deeds

And finding that of fifty seeds

She often brings but one to bear.

I falter where I firmly trod,

And falling with my weight of cares

Upon the great world's altar stairs

That slope through darkness up to God.

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope

And gather dust and chaff and call

To what I feel is Lord of all,

And faintly trust the larger hope.

Quivering human nerves know something that is called pain. How does Durgā stand to that ?

For the Gods that men make to themselves will not all utter the same voice of the Universal Life, but unless they have been so realised as to feed their worshipper's hunger, some faculty of his will be starved and stunted. We must remember that all this is but one way of seeing God—that every act and feeling is unconscious worship. God is its real soul, and if we hunger for love or for sympathy or for some word of encouragement and comfort, it is not in man that we shall find it—though it may be through man for the moment that our cry is stilled. And so in the symbol that we make of God, we need do no violence at all to this hungry human heart. We may and must satisfy it. Does Durgā do this ?

If not—the great World Force, indifferent to pain as to pleasure, is clearly not the mother of the soul.

In Jagadhatri we have some development of the notion of protection. But it is before Káli—the terrible one,—Káli the tongue of flame—Káli—the face seen in a fire—Káli, surrounded by forms of death and destruction, that the soul hushes itself at last, and utters that one word—“Mother.”

To the children she is “Mother” simply after their childhood’s need. The mother who protects, with whom we take refuge—who says to the soul, as God says to all of us sometimes : “My little child—you need not know much in order to please me. Only love me dearly.”

And if in all that surrounds Her, there is anything to our grown-up vision terrible, their eyes are sealed that they do not know it, and they find in her—as is the case with all emblems—only what their own life and experience leads them to understand.

And to the grown man, she is “Mother” after his need—the mother who does not protect but makes strong to overcome, who demands the very best that we can give, and will be content with nothing less.

‘Not, you see that in Káli there is balm for every wound—not that for the pain she gives the sweet—not that the truth of things is to be blinked and protection to be given to one, that means the desertion of another. We shall see that as long as we need that, as long as we in life are glad to take a place in the cool that leaves another to bear the burden and heat of the day, as long as we are thankful to possess, as long as we are cowards, even for those we love, so long we shall look for a coward’s satisfaction in our God. And we shall find it.

But when we have grown past this, we shall find the right hand uplifted in blessing, while the left destroys. We shall see the moment of destruction of the Universe as the moment of realisation. Life will be a song of ecstasy and thanks-giving that the last sacrifice has been demanded from us.

KALI THE MOTHER

The stars are blotted out
 The clouds are covering clouds;
 It is darkness, vibrant, sonant.

In the roaring, whirling wind,
 Are the souls of a million lunatics,
 Just loose from prison house,
 Wrenching tree by the roots
 Sweeping all from the path.

The sea has joined the fray
 And swirls up mountain waves
 To reach the pitching sky.

The flash of lurid light
 Reveals on every side
 A thousand, thousand shades
 Of Death begrimed and black—

Scattering plagues and sorrows,
 Dancing mad with joy.
 Come, Mother, come.

For terror is Thy name.
 Death is in Thy breath.
 And every shaking step
 Destroys a world for e'er.
 Thou, 'Time,' the All-Destroyer,
 Come, O Mother, come.

Who dares misery love,
 Enjoy destruction's dance and son
 To him the Mother comes.

Religion, it appears, is not something made for gentlehood. Religion is for the heart of the people. To refine is to emasculate it. Every man must be able there to find bread. I must always illustrate from Christianity. I know that we have to thank God for certain elements of crudity and superstition that Christianity contains, that carry it to places that without these it could never reach.

The man who derives brutal satisfaction from life, or who sees no further than the surface of things, this man has a right to find these satisfactions, and to make for himself a worship which shall express these instincts. The man who is violent in his modes of thought, and vivid in his apprehension of life, the man who appreciates the struggle of Nature, and is strong enough to plunge into it fearlessly that man has a right to offer to God that which he hourly demands from life. He who with precisely the same instincts as these, is full of the pity of life and of creation, will see in God the Refuge of All, the Divine Mother—pitiful and compassionate. He will echo Her cry to the world: "Humanity, Humanity, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and ye would not!"

But consciousness will not be arrested even here. After all, what is the meaning of death—of destruction of the visible—of all these forms of horror and fear? Is it not the manifestation of that Divine Energy that carries through fire and slaughter and blind cruelty the message of love and deliverance home to us? And the man to whom once the great word of religion was "My child, you need not know much in order to please Me. Only love Me dearly. Talk to Me as you would talk to your mother, if she had taken you on her knee,"—that same man will now be able to say through every word and act and thought "Though Thou slay me, yet will I trust in Thee."

And at some infinitely distant time, perhaps, when duality is gone, and not even God is any longer God, may that other experience come of which the Master spoke when he said—"It is always on the bosom of dead Divinity that the blissful Mother dances Her dance celestial."

As the child is occupied solely with the counting of some few objects,

and the grown man with the truths of the higher mathematics, and as even those truths are transcended in reality by the faculty which they have developed, so here—the first symbols are as necessary as the last, if we are to reach the end. There was no ultimate importance in those early operations of counting, yet the mathematics could not have existed without them. So worship must have its feet in the clay, if with its head it is to reach to Heaven. At every stage, however, we realise something that is to remain with us. *To the children of the Mother, all men must be brothers.* Separation is not. Difference is not. There is the common Motherhood. Men speak Her words to us, supplicate with Her hands, love with Her eyes, and our part to them is infinite service. What does personal salvation matter, if God, the infinite God, calls for love and service ?

And we realise the *greatness of fact*. No betrayal of truth is so terrible as that of choosing what is beautiful and easy and soft, to be believed and worshipped. Let us face also and just as willingly the terrible—the ugly—the hard.

God gave life—true. But He also kills. God is Eternity, but with that idea does there not rise the black shadow of time, beginning and ending in obscurity ?

I have been born in happy circumstances. He gave them. How dare I say that, when to another He gave hardship and pain and care ? Shall I not worship Him in this manifestation of destruction, nay, is this not the very place where I shall kneel and call Him Mother ?

But linked with this sincerity is that other which leads us to it and beyond it. "If thy hand or thy foot offend thee—cut it off, and cast it from thee. Better is it to enter into life halt or maimed than having two hands or two feet to be cast out into ignorance." The God of Truth must needs be the God of Sacrifice. And, last of all, the great glory of this Mother-worship lies in its bestowal of *Mankhood*. Time after time Kali has given men to India. In the history of Protap Sing, of Shivaji, and of the Sikhs stand the men She gave. If Bengal, the cradle of Her worship, the home of Her Saints, parts with Her worship, she will part at the same time with her manhood. It is her part to renew that.

ancient worship with ten times greater devotion, for the loss would be to her lasting peril and disgrace.

It is well to remember, that we seek truth, not the triumph of a party. And it is also well to remember, that where the question of authority comes in, the only authoritative fault-finder would be that man who had realised all that Káli-Worship has to give.

And He found no fault. Rather, He uttered a message in the name of the Divine Mother that is to-day going out into all the world, and calling the nations to Her Feet.

Some objections and their answers.

The lecturer now proceeded to deal with some of the doubts that she had heard expressed at the Albert Hall meeting by several gentlemen as to the worship of Káli.

In the first place some-one had said that it was surely impossible to worship the Infinite God as an image.

In answer to this, Sister Nivedita said that the Hindu practice was not that of addressing worship to the image. In strictness this was only used as a suggestion on which to concentrate the mind. The worship was really localised in a jar of water standing in front, and symbolising the in-filling power of God in nature.

But she would go back to her old proposition that everything as we see it is a way of seeing God, and then she would ask why we were here at all, if it was not because at this stage of being. We saw God under images, and could not see Him otherwise? We ourselves were the image of God, every motion of our lives was worship of Him under one of these forms, our own or another's, and since we were on this plane was it not obvious that our devotion would do well to accept the fact, in order that we might the sooner rise from it by natural evolution?

The next difficulty was suggested by the nature of the Káli-symbol itself. It was such, said the objector, that the sense of motherhood must quail before it. This argument was taken up by a second speaker who compared it with the Catholic Madonna and Child to its great disadvantage.

Sister Nivedita said this was to be met by a three-fold argument. In

the first place, while it was true that throughout a certain period in Europe art-development and the religious idea had gone hand in hand, with the result that the external attractiveness of the latter was vastly enhanced, yet they were not to suppose that the image of the Madonna and Child had always been beautiful. To the out-sider unconscious of the glow of feeling which belongs to the devotee, those early Byzantine paintings and carvings seem as lifeless and ugly, perhaps, as the Kali image to the Europeanised critic.

Secondly this state of things was no deterrent to progress in art and sculpture. For down to the days of her greatest sculpture and perhaps later all Greece went on pilgrimage to the shrine of an almost shapeless idol at Delphi and the same generation that knelt there in reverence had produced Phidios.

And third, as a matter of fact these considerations did not touch the point at issue. To Her worshippers the image of the Mother was not ugly. How could that form that you had loved and venerated from your babyhood be a thing apart from you, at which you could stand quietly looking with criticism in your heart? Violence and ugliness and unrealism were epithets that could be applied only by the alien. It was always so with religious symbols. Men see in them only what their own life and experience and thought enable them to see. Does the Christian ever picture what he means when he sings—"There is a fountain filled with blood?"

Many of the purest and holiest of religious associations lay for some people in such utterances as that; needless to say they were never examined critically. This fact was of the essence of symbolism. But even to the eyes of the European art critic the Kali image had a remarkably dramatic character, which could not be lost sight of. All early art struggled with thought and feeling, for the adequate expression of which it had no means, but the intensity of significance in this case was obvious and startling to even the most accustomed eye.) The objector who had brought up the argument as to the superiority of European sculpture would have mentioned this point also had he been a European. Meanwhile, with regard to their own mythology, and their own work, the Indian people ought to take their eyes off the west and

cease to compare. Let them go on putting more and more idealism and reverence in their own way into the portrayal of the Mother; and they would at last produce something national and great. Otherwise they would be misled by the mere superficial prettiness of foreign execution without understanding its deep inspirations and ideals, and so would still further vulgarise and degrade their own by Europeanising it.

The next objection raised had been on the point of sacrifice. The lecturer answered that this question had already been dealt with. There was to her ears a certain insincerity in the proposition that one might sacrifice to oneself but not to Divinity. There was no blinking of facts in this Káli worship. What we levied by, that we must give. Yet she was glad to think that it was not the sacrifice of others but of ourselves that was the ultimate offering laid down in the Káli-ritual. All present would remember the forms to which she was referring. This was why *Sakti* worship gave so much power because strength comes only of Renunciation,—and Káli could not be worshipped without Renunciation and increasing Renunciation too. That thought of life lived in union with a sacrifice which was such a strong motive in Christianity was born once more amongst the Indian people in this system. And because no other motive could be so strong and so enduring. She was not content merely to apologise for Káli-worship but eager with all her strength to drive home its claims.

The last to take part in the discussion had been an old man who with tears entreated the audience to give up idolatry. He painted the temple and pilgrim—the shrines of India—in the strongest terms as scenes of licence and debauchery. He was convinced that the weakness of the country was the result of image worship simply; and he pointed out that Káli was accused of having occasioned human sacrifice. Sister Nivedita replied that she could by no means grant that the premises stated by her friend were true. Each count in the indictment was in her eyes non-proven.

The history of human sacrifices had especially been written by the enemies of Káli. But if it were true what did it add to the fact that men occasionally committed murder? Simply nothing one way or another.

She would hark back to her old formula (which in this case might

make her point of view more comprehensible). If every thing is Divine and every act worship, then murder is also an act of worship being evidently the way in which certain natures approach God. Therefore human sacrifice is simply a special form of crime.

But the argument that a religious idea otherwise granted to be noble and true was to be held accountable for the vagaries of its followers was in itself ridiculous. What religion had burnt most human beings in the name of its Master? Christianity: Did any one dream of holding Jesus responsible for this? Would they be right if they did? Certainly not. It was the same with regard to the terrible charges of debauchery that were brought up. If the religious truth enunciated is allowed to be sound and noble no more was to be said. It cannot be called to account for its opposite. It was probably true that the same *Satanites* and *diabolistes* societies existed in Paris, in London and in America, veiling similar practices under the cloak of another religion; it was probable that no principle was ever propounded in this world without provoking some one to rise up and contradict it more or less violently. But we could not therefore cease to proclaim moral principles. Nor in the same way could we denounce Indian religion as the cause of Indian crime.

In conclusion the lecturer begged her hearers to understand that she had not a word to say against Religious doubt. At bottom doubt of a religion was faith in the supremacy of Truth—it was our duty to stand by our doubts, listen to them, investigate for them and only lay them in a descent grave if they took to death of their own accord. The mind that doubted—earnestly doubted—was the mind that lived. But let us doubt enough. Do not let us accept the easiest or the pleasantest explanation as sufficient. It was so easy to say that God is love, and to think that our own private happiness proves it. God is Love—but when do we learn that? How do we know it? Is it not in moments of anguish in our own lives that the Great Reality is borne in upon us as all Love, all Beauty, all Bliss? This was the paradox so boldly stated in the Kali-image—this great paradox of Nature and of the universe and of the Soul of Man—that She who stands there surrounded by all that is terrible to Humanity is nevertheless the Mother and all we Her babes.